

Woodstock Community Video
Ken Marsh

Founded by Ken Marsh. Members included Barbara Buckner, Bob Dacy, Gary Hill, Steven Kolpan, Elaine Milosh. WCV was interested in alternative programming for cable, and served as a production center for cable programs. WCV began Artists TV Lab, which moved to Rhinebeck in 1976. From 1975-77 WCV presented Woodstock Video Expovision, a festival of NYS media artists. 1972-75 Tobe Carey served as Media Services Coordinator.

Woodstock Community Video: A Brief History

Ken Marsh 1974

Excerpted from *Independent Video: A Complete Guide to the Physics, Operation, and Application of the New Television for the Student, The Artist and for Community TV* 1974

Woodstock Community Video The Artists' TV Lab

Ken Marsh, Director undated

Woodstock Community Video: A Brief History

In 1970, two years after TV making became accessible to people outside the TV industry, an alternate media movement emerged and the decentralizing of media resources began. Using ½ inch video systems, independent organizations produced programs about people and events either not covered or unfairly treated by the mass media. Unable to negotiate with the media establishment and denied access to broadcast TV, they set up video theatres, using schoolrooms and even living rooms as local information centers to show tapes on such subjects as alternate life styles, communes, liberation activities of various communities, as well as raps with artists and educators.

Woodstock Community Video (WCV) is an outgrowth of one of those centers-People's Video Theatre (PVT) which was set up by Elliot Glass and myself. When first setting up PVT in a New York City loft for viewing tapes, and in turn taping views, we defined the following objectives which we believed to be essential to a community video resource: to provide people with a medium for exposing their goods, services, and ideas; to stimulate community dialogue; to develop community video journalism; to provide a public-access production facility; and to establish a video library.

Four newly-begun video groups-Videofreex, Raindance, Global Village, and People's Video Theatre-demonstrated new ways in which media could function in the hands of people who felt either cut off from the viewpoint of mass media, or who were attempting to control their own information to prevent its distortion. In the latter part of 1970, the movement received some publicity from a not overly sympathetic press. An article in New York Magazine dubbed the movement "guerilla TV." Within months, Newsweek reported on some of the more sensational aspects, which included a British video group's (TVX) takeover of the David Frost show.

The New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA) provided grants to the four video groups operating in New York during that time. People's Video Theatre had been functioning successfully in Greenwich Village, drawing tourist audiences during weekend nights. But attempts to reach the local community were not successful. Cable TV with its public-access channels was beginning to provide a means for the dissemination of independently-produced, TV, but those systems' penetration in the city was uneven and minimal. The essence of alternate media, programmer/audience interaction, appeared to me to be unrealizable in the big-city context. So in the fall of 1971, Elaine Milosh and I moved to Woodstock, New

York to set up a community video resource there.

Woodstock is a community of about 6,000 people located in the Catskill Mountains of the mid-Hudson region of New York State. It has had an operating cable system since 1965, supplying about 1,500 subscribers with reception of mainly New York City TV. A relatively small system (but with a potential to double), Woodstock's cable, then owned by NBC, is a part of Kingston Cablevision, a system with over 10,000 subscribers. Local origination programming was being provided for the Kingston system, but Woodstock with its separate headend received no local fare. Woodstock has a low population density with an approximate average of 25 homes along every mile. The cable industry takes the position that economically they cannot survive with too many under 40 homes along every mile. Thus, the cable system has only been developed in the high-density areas of the town.

The town has a sizable population of longhairs, a bedroom community for IBMers working in nearby Kingston, a rural citizenry with roots in the early Huguenot-Dutch settlements, and an artist colony established over 75 years ago. It has two weekly newspapers and is connected to the larger region by AM radio originating in Kingston and by that city's daily paper:

Our arrival in Woodstock coincided with the local elections, and so our first project involved taping all the candidates running for local office, playing those tapes back on the streets, and in turn taping the reactions and comments- of the voters on the issues. For some eight days before the election we set monitors on trashcans in front of various stores along the main street (from which we obtained power) and made arid displayed tapes. The candidates of all but one party readily participated, while it took a vocal request at a public meeting .for those of the holdout party to finally agree to join in.

Within a few months of that event, we published a pamphlet to inform people about cable TV in general, the local system in particular, and about the potentials of community video:

“...community programming is a tool for vitalizing communications. . .in a time of complex and varying social values and problems. Our local TV. . .can provide the town with its own message-making facilities. . .a community cable channel. . .low-cost advertising for local businesses. . .video programs in schools, churches, social groups, etc.”

The pamphlet also outlined a plan of action requesting that the town government help citizens obtain cable service where there wasn't any, and that it provide space for a community channel studio in Town Hall. Other institutions were asked to participate in creating programs as part of their activities. And the public at large was asked to support the development of community video by letting the cable company know that they wanted a community channel as well as support for its operations.

The pamphlet was distributed in early 1972, prior to a project which included a 12-week series of video shows held in cooperation with the Woodstock Artists Association, in its gallery in the center of town. Each show consisted of a half-hour-long video magazine on local events and issues, followed by a live forum discussion and taping of the audience. During this period, we were approaching Kingston Cablevision and the Town Board to start the ball rolling. And in some instances the weekly show served as a public meeting to deal with our campaign. For example, atone show attended by a member of the Town Board and the cable company's program director, the initial arrangements were made to test our 1/2-inch equipment to see if it could be used for cablecasting. Within three months the company completed the tests and by the end of May 1972, WCV did its first two-hour, once-a-week (a limit set by the cable company) cablecast from the system's headend located on a nearby mountainside.

Patience and persistence are prerequisites for working with town governments and cable companies. The local government took until January 1973 to act. It set up a committee on cable TV to study and make

recommendations for a new cable franchise to be negotiated in the fall. Also at that time, as a result of months of urging, the cable company offered to install an origination line at Town Hall so that programming could be cablecast from the center of town. With operations based in town, programming could be expanded, and cablecast at any time of day. It then took some eight months to come to an agreement. The cable company took three months to prepare a document it wanted the town to sign, three more months for the town officials to consider and reconsider whether they really wanted it, and another couple of months redrawing the document so it was agreeable to both parties. Meanwhile, every week on Wednesday night at 7:30 pm WCV Channel 6 has gone on cable with live and taped programming: mini Documentaries, news, talk shows, Town Board meetings, election information, and occasional outside productions from other communities.

Some interesting questions emerged during the Town Board's deliberations on the desirability of a town-government-based community cable channel. Valid concerns were expressed regarding programming content, access, and responsibility for these things. With sensitivities directed toward their electorate, the Board members looked dimly on possible association with the expression of extreme political views, or the exposure of off-beat life styles which could offend the more conservative viewers. Our response to this took two forms: In setting up Woodstock Community Video as a non-profitmaking, tax exempt, educational organization, it was decided that it have a board of directors composed of the broadest possible spectrum of interests represented in the town. One of its major responsibilities would be to guide the selection of content and to ensure fairness in access. Secondly, Marco Vassi, a writer working in video, provided us with a written document which has been accepted as the guideline for operating the community channel by our Board and the local government:

"... Responsibility for a full-time open channel requires total commitment to the principles of accurate information, technical competence, artistic integrity, and good taste.

"Our aim is to produce and exhibit tapes and live programming which is vivid and coherent; the goal is a multiplicity of voices, each distinct and strong, rather than an imposed conformity. We believe that the purpose of local origination is to give the community the opportunity to look at itself from the inside, thus coming to terms with its complexity of values and problems.

"As a channel we have no mandate or desire for censorship. In fact, we will be... beneficial to the community only to the degree that we are free to experiment with form and content

"We recognize, however, three areas of influence and restraint: legal requirements, broad community feedback, and the variety of sources of program material.

a) Legal requirements: These involve the regulations of the FCC and other governmental agencies, the stipulations of the town-authorized cable operator(s), and the general laws involving libel; through our attorneys we will remain informed about these jurisdictions;

b) Broad community feedback: We will exercise sensitivity to general reactions to individual programs and types of programs; ...we are pledged to keep the channel from engendering alienation in the community;

c) Sources for program material: As moderately priced, easily operated equipment becomes more prevalent in schools, churches, special-interest groups, and among individuals, the base of our programming will spread to allow participation by everyone in the community, although, at the core of the station will remain a nexus of managers, producers; and WCV Board members, who will be responsible for quality control.

"We shall maintain a weekly schedule to be announced several times each-broadcast day, and to appear in the local newspapers. The programs will be described in enough detail to afford viewers full discretion in their choice of program material.

"Ultimately, there is no substitute for good faith. A local channel, operating almost entirely from local

resources, and- available twenty-four hours a day, is an invaluable means for processing the , information flow which keeps the town vital. In addition, it is a forum for teachers, artists, politicians, merchants, and the general citizen. To keep this channel open in such a way that aids us all in the problems of survival, that serves as a valid means of relaxation, and yet follows the highest individuation of viewpoint presupposes a thorough understanding of the nature of the medium and mutual trust between those who operate the channel and the community they serve.

“To maintain that understanding and that trust is our basic guideline.”

PRESENT AND FUTURE

Involvement of local people has been integral to every project since the first, when Bob Dacey, a local artist/ filmmaker, headed up the elections program. However, funding has so far provided support for only -a director, an assistant, and maintenance of the facility. Sustained, active participation has therefore come only from those with their own resources. There are a number of independent video producers working in the area who have contributed programming to the channel. Other people too, not so media-occupied, have produced programs. For instance, the chairman of the town cable committee (an insurance salesman by trade) produced an interview show; and teenage members of a WCV workshop have produced tapes on the streets of Woodstock. Other programs have been made by a couple of artists who are exploring the video medium; several women who have participated in producing tapes on rape, breast cancer, women performers, etc.; and a teacher working with elementary school kids who has produced improvisational pieces for tape.

With a second grant from the NYSCA, we are now setting up an Artists' TV Lab to explore the creative applications of the medium for the arts. With the community channel soon to be installed at Town Hall and so allowing more time to cablecast, community organizations are beginning to plan programming. For instance, the town's Narcotics Guidance Council is considering a series dealing with drug abuse; a youth center has proposed a video workshop from which shows would come; made by and about youth; some clergymen have discussed religious shows; and The Family, a social services organization, is considering using local TV to extend their programs. Programmers are asked to support their own productions by paying low fees to cover the cost of tape, equipment maintenance, and depreciation. Since most groups have publicity and educational activities items in their budgets, many of them can support low-cost -production activities. Further support is anticipated from viewers as our programming gains more appeal and value to them. And local industry and business support most likely will increase as audience size increases.

The existence of Woodstock Community Video, like so many other fledgling community media groups throughout the country, represents the need and desire for locally responsive media to meet local needs and values. Hopefully, some of the information here will both encourage and reinforce similar efforts by providing a model from which to expand. Still in the early stage of development, we all need support.

Ken Marsh, WCV, March '74

Woodstock Community Video The Artists' TV Lab

Ken Marsh, Director undated c. 1976

The Artists' TV Lab was established in 1973 with a grant from the New York State Council on the Arts. It is designed to serve: 1) as a video resource center in the Catskill/Mid-Hudson region of New York state providing artists of all disciplines the opportunity to access ½" video technology at little or no cost; and 2) to conduct video training workshops to promote the broader use of the medium. Also, through WCV's town cable TV channel programming activities, the Lab can provide an outlet for the exposure of video

works.

In the 3 years of Lab operations, WCV has expanded its equipment base from B/W to color editing facilities with color synthesis and adjunct audio system, keeping up-to-date technologically, though somewhat limited, in the amount of resources. Approximately 50 artists annually have utilized Lab resources and staff expertise. The staff is made up of artists, themselves, who lend their creative energy to benefit other as well as perform their own works.

The Artists' TV Lab is presently being; expanded and refined to play a greater role in the creative environment of the Northeastern region. It is to this that this statement is addressed.

BACKGROUND

Throughout the history of Western civilization have been periods of interplay between the arts and the sciences which have contributed to shape human consciousness and the environment. In an age when science was embodied in religious belief systems, the arts of painting and sculpture articulated consciousness of gods and spirit-powers contributing to the creation of symbol forms and systems.

During the Renaissance, knowledge was liberated from the gods and empirical experience and experimentation gained credence and wide application. Creative individuals crisscrossed the boundaries of the sciences and the arts contributing to contemporary frameworks of knowledge, i.e., anatomy, astronomy, chemistry, physics, etc., while advancing graphic, sculptural, and architectural forms and systems.

Nineteenth century industrialization altered object-making from hand-crafted techniques to machine manufactured technologies. Technology, as mechanical extension of human capabilities to levels beyond human capacities, can be viewed as an outgrowth of the interplay of the arts and the sciences; an outgrowth which today stands on a par.

As technology was expanded, based on scientific data, new media were developed, i.e., photography, sound recording, radio, TV, etc. The mass-media emerged and have expanded creative potentials and the means by which the arts are experienced. Industrial processes and new materials gave impetus to the formation of such artists' environments as the Bauhaus. It represented one of the first movements by artists touched by the technological environment to organize interdisciplinary cooperation and feed back to that environment, while maintaining individual creative expression as a primary value.

Of the more recent link-ups of the arts and the sciences is the Bell Labs assisted Experiments in Art and Technology (E.A.T.) which witnessed the engagement of electronic technologies and the artist. Now, TV and computers, audio synthesizers and bio-feedback systems are emerging as prime tools of artists. Much of the concepts of the works coming from these artists are based in nature, as was the case in the Bauhaus which was strongly invested in an aesthetic of the natural and organic. Today's natural and organic is commensurate with the advanced levels of scientific investigation; levels of sub-atomic physics, electro-chemical bioprocesses, etc.

Due to the high costs of technologies and advanced scientific research there has been a decrease of individual efforts and a growth of institutional and corporate structures. Industry has become the prime mover of technological developments and the prime consumer thereof. Thus, profit considerations override creative, social, and humanistic ones. Limited access to technology prohibits broad and frequent exploration and development of uses related to the arts. Artists, once so instrumental in shaping human consciousness and the environment, are kept from optimal realization of their role in society. While product development laboratories are numerous, artists' laboratories are almost non-existent.

PURPOSE

It is with cognizance of the above and in that spirit that we are undertaking to expand and refine WV's Artists' TV Lab. The primary purpose of the Lab will be to provide and maintain a center to promote interdisciplinary cooperation among artists of various media, scholars and scientists of various pursuits. The Lab will include a pool of equipment composed of a variety of electronic technologies made available to Lab participants for individual and cooperative projects, an information exchange component for the collection and dissemination of materials related to the arts and the sciences, and an electronic media performance capability to encourage the production of events for public exposure of experimental forms of creative expression.

The Lab will act to serve the growing consciousness and concern of many practitioners and lay people for the technological and scientific environment and its social impact, particularly in the arts. It will fill the need for an installation in which artists can access expensive technologies in an environment conducive to their ways of working, unimpeded by commercial considerations. The Lab will serve to bring together and create common languages and experiences for creative individuals of various pursuits in the arts, the sciences, and technology.

FACILITY

The physical plant for Lab activities includes an edit room, tape archive, office, studio, and rooming facilities. It is located in Woodstock, N.Y., a long-time Catskill Mt. retreat for artists of the New York metropolitan area and a year-round artists' colony since the turn of the century. Parnassus Square, conveniently situated near the center of town, is a complex of barns with winterized spaces for year round use. WCV presently occupies a 20' x 40' barn which serves as a studio, office, and small video theatre with a 60 seat capacity. The building is also equipped with a town cable TV channel origination line for direct and live programming to the community. A second space houses the edit room, archive, and rooming facilities which are made available to program participants for their stay in Woodstock. Other spaces within the complex can serve for eventual expansion. They include a 40' x 80' barn with possible two storey capacity.

LAB PROGRAMS

The Lab is structured into a four-part program: '1) Symposia; 2) Magazine; 3) Synergism; and 4) Equipment Pool.

SYMPOSIA

The optimum utilization of any resource is invariably furthered by easy access to the accumulated information about that resource. Sources for information are: 1) people directly involved in a specific area of activity; and 2) storage media, i.e., print, magnetic tape, film, etc., which serve to record the experiences and reflections thereof, of people involved in specific areas of activity, i.e., artists, researchers, practitioners, etc.

Libraries and archives serve to centralize and conveniently locate recorded information and thereby maximize access. Human informational resources are similarly housed under a single roof, however, only in a few situations, i.e., universities, corporations, government agencies, etc., which tend to limit open access. Due to specialized work goals, valuable interdisciplinary interactions are not commonplace. Only during infrequent professional gatherings do dislocated practitioners come together, and then they are usually of like concerns. Seldom are the opportunities for organized, cross-referencing of a variety of areas of concern toward experimentation and development of holistic systems and theories.

The Symposia program is specifically designed to develop formats for needed interdisciplinary activities. Artists, scholars, scientists, etc., will be brought together to share their ideas and energies to benefit

themselves, their areas of concern, and society. Anticipated on a regular basis are series of symposia dealing with themes relevant to the contemporary issues confronting the arts, the sciences, and technology.

To date, under this program, WCV holds an annual video festival, the Woodstock Video Expovision, and periodic symposia with featured guests leading all-day activities involving a limited audience of artists, scholars, etc.

The first video festival was held in August 1975 over a five-day period. It consisted of tape showings of about 50 video makers of New York State. Evening events included a video synthesizer lecture-demonstration, an electronic media performance with dance, a presentation of tapes and discussion by Earthscore Foundation on ecological and behavioral philosophies of media, a video environment by artists of Media Bus, and a panel discussion of issues related to the medium with such participants as Gerd Stern of Intermedia Systems, Barbara London of the Museum of Modern Art, and John Godfrey of WNET's Experimental TV Lab. The 1976 Expovision will occur in September and feature the theme of Arts and Technology in all evening presentations. Assistance from the New York Foundation on the Arts has been helpful in bringing about the video festival and symposia.

Notable are 4 day-long symposia to take place within early 1976. Guest leaders will be Charles Dodge of Columbia University, School of Music, Joel Chadabee of the Music Dept. of SUNY Albany, Ralph Hocking of the Experimental TV Center in Binghamton, and Woody and Steina Vasulka of SUNY Buffalo. The day's activities will include showings and performances of the works of guests, seminar on guest's area of concern, discussion and cooperative effort to create a work utilizing the town cable TV channel for public exposure.

MAGAZINE

As there is limited interdisciplinary activity in the arts and the sciences, so there is a lack of recorded information. Given a mechanism which could provide easy access to, and be philosophically oriented toward interdisciplinary concerns, an expansion of such activity could occur.

Inherent in media are formats for packaging and distribution of information. Since the Lab is primarily equipped with tools of electronic media, it can organically generate audio and video tapes reporting its activities for others to hear and view. Further, print products are a regular part of the output of this organization, and serve to interconnect it with others in the locale and across the country.

The Magazine program of the Artists' TV Lab will function to collect, compile, produce, and distribute print and tape information on a regular basis. The effort will be dedicated to dissemination of information of the arts, sciences, and technology emphasizing interdisciplinary activities, theories, and potentials reflecting the development of creative expression and the enrichment of the cultural environment.

SYNERGISM

Common experiences are prerequisite for effective communication among individuals of varying interests. Such Communications can lead to more frequent and qualitative interactions. As a particular configuration of commonly accessible resources, the Artists' TV Lab is like an instrument; an instrument which requires a number of players to cooperatively manipulate it.

Synergism, as defined in a dictionary, is the simultaneous action of separate agencies which, together, have greater total effect than the sum of their original effects. WCV has taken this term to describe its electronic media performance program. Synergism is the interplay of systems, i.e., the arts, sciences, and technology; dance, electronically generated sound and image; people, machines, and concepts; etc. It is

that function of the Lab which serves to facilitate the working together of artists, scientists, scholars, etc., in producing performances, exhibitions, TV programming, etc. for public exposure.

Synergism has, to date, performed publically at the Woodstock Video Expovision 75, the Woodstock Artists Association, the Joyous Lake Supper Club, and the Anthology Film Archives in New York. Works have utilized live video inputs mixed with pre-recorded video inputs fed into a video synthesizer, raster control devices, colorizer, signal generators, audio synthesized, pre-recorded and live treated sound, a light keyboard-control device with color illumination, sculpture, some with sound generation, and dancers.

Expansion of technological capabilities include the incorporation of medically related systems for monitoring biological functions and their use as compositional elements in performances; Also, interfability among various systems, such as the video, audio, and lights for common, centralized control using computers for programming. Also, to facilitate production of print materials as a part of the Magazine program, mimeography equipment, i.e., stencil cutter, printer, binder, etc., will be acquired. A photo lab will be set up and include Kirlian photography equipment.

ADMINISTRATION

The Artists' TV Lab is administered by Woodstock Community Video, Inc., a not-for-profit, tax-exempt, cultural organization chartered in the state of New York. The expansion and refinement of the Lab necessitates attracting funds and in-kind contributions from a variety of sources in both the private and public sectors. Support is required for equipment acquisition, maintenance, and development, administrative costs such as staff, space and utilities, and other operating expenses, and funds for operating the Magazine and Symposia programs, i.e., publication supplies, honorariums, etc.

WCV is researching local higher educational institutions, i.e., Bard College, Vassar College, Marist College, and others, for possible establishment of an associative relationship beneficial to both institutions; for the educational site, an off-campus research facility for its scholars and students, and for WCV, an avenue to the academic sphere and its resources on a stable and regular basis.

In summary, the Artists' TV Lab will function to serve as a creative development laboratory for artists, scientists, and scholars to explore and realize greater interdisciplinary interactions toward the development of creative forms of expression and enrichment of the cultural environment.